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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: REPORTING ON RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS; NEW WEEKLY  
PAPER AL DESTOUR; DEATH OF ACTOR AHMED ZAKI: EGYPTIAN  
MEDIA THEMES, MARCH 27 TO APRIL 3

REF: A. CAIRO 2516  
[1](#)B. CAIRO 2433  
[1](#)C. CAIRO 1843

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. Egyptian newspapers carried only limited reporting of the recent demonstrations in Cairo and around Egypt by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the opposition Kifaya ("Enough") movement. Al Destour ("The Constitution"), a weekly paper with an aggressive tone, reappeared on the newsstands after an eight-year hiatus. Egyptian media reported extensively on the life of film and TV star Ahmed Zaki, who died last week of cancer. Three Alexandria-based employees of Egyptian TV (ETV) are seeking to overturn a ban on veils and hope to resume their jobs as on-camera TV presenters. End summary.

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Main Themes in the Egyptian Media  
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[1](#)2. Media coverage of various demonstrations: Although pan-Arab media, print and broadcast, covered the demonstrations held in Cairo, only local independent and opposition press covered a Muslim Brotherhood (MB) demonstration on March 27 and a Kifaya demonstrations on March 30. (See refs A and B for more information on these demonstrations.) One widely read columnist writing in independent Al Masri Al Youm (circulation: 20,000) on March 29 criticized the GOE's use of the emergency law and a curfew saying, "They banned not only vehicles...but also prohibited humans, donkeys, dogs, and cats from walking...." A report in the same paper on March 28 quoted MB "guide" Mohamed Mahdi Akif as saying the state of "political obstruction in Egypt is the reason for the scientific, technological, and cultural backwardness, as well as the stifling economic crises and marginalization of Egypt's strategic and pivotal role." The editor-in-chief of pro-government daily Al Gomhouriya (circulation: 200,000), alluding to the MB, warned the U.S. on March 29 lest they extend their hands to "some element, who, after it is too late, surprise them by directing their arrows against them." Egyptian TV ignored completely the several Kifaya demonstrations staged in Cairo, Alexandria, and Mansoura, but Al Gomhouriya ran a Middle East News Agency report on March 30 saying the Kifaya request to stage demonstrations was denied because they had failed to obtain a permit. Independent daily Al Masri Al Youm carried news of the demonstrations on page one.

[1](#)3. New weekly Al Destour: After the Al Ghad ("Tomorrow") party leader Ayman Nour was reportedly forced by the GOE to dismiss editor-in-chief Ibrahim Issa from the Al Ghad party weekly paper (ref C), the latter found work with Al Destour. Al Destour ("The Constitution") returned to the newsstands on March 23 after an eight-year publication hiatus and seven years in court. Under editor-in-chief Issa, Al Destour has adopted an aggressive tone. Its attractive layout features plentiful cartoons. On March 30, the front-page feature questioned whether the GOE would allow free elections for president when it does not permit them for student unions. Alongside was a multiple-choice question asking if the GOE is afraid of: a. the people; b. the Brotherhood; or c. the Americans. The paper sold out all 63,000 copies of its March 23 edition and is expected to sell even more copies in the future.

[1](#)4. Death of movie star Ahmed Zaki: Egyptians mourned the passing of Ahmed Zaki, who died of cancer this week at the age of 57. Many younger Egyptians know the lives of Gamal Abdul Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and the blind reformer Taha Hussein as much through Ahmed Zaki's acting roles as from any other source. Weekly magazines ran cover stories with heart-rending accounts of his difficult life before becoming a star. Virtually all reports highlighted Egyptian grief over his death; but one opposition columnist, writing in independent daily Al Masri Al Youm, argued that Zaki had been exploited politically by the GOE and economically by those hoping to profit from his death. Zaki had been working on a film called "The Lark" about the late Abdul Halim Hafez, whose songs are still heard daily

on TV reruns of classic black and white Egyptian films.

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OTHER NEWS  
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15. Three veiled Alexandria women appeal decision keeping them off camera: The three presenters brought their case to the Egyptian TV arbitration board after they were taken off the air when they put on the veil ("hijab"). According to the new English-language independent, weekly Cairo Magazine of March 24-30, the three won the endorsement of the arbitration board, but remain skeptical about their professional futures. One TV official pointed out that the decision to preclude veiled women from appearing on TV is a political one "based on the fear that the public spread of Islamic symbols could play into the hands of Islamists" wanting to promote "sharia" law. An Administrative Court is expected to issue its ruling in the case on April 12.

GRAY